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NEWS

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U.S. and Dutch Governments Sign Memorandum of Understanding on Elimination of Weapons Grade Plutonium Production

The Hague, Netherlands – In a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed today by the United States and the Netherlands, the Dutch have agreed to contribute one million euros to an American-led program to construct power plants that will replace the last plutonium-producing nuclear reactors in Russia. The program is part of the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) Elimination of Weapons Grade Plutonium Production (EWGPP) program.

On behalf of the DOE, Clifford Sobel, Ambassador of the United States to the Netherlands, signed the agreement with Dr. Bernard Rudolf Bot, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

"The signing of this MOU is a positive step in the effort to address nonproliferation and nuclear safety concerns shared by both Dutch and Americans. Shutting down the plutonium production reactor at Zheleznogorsk will prevent weapons-grade material from getting into the hands of terrorists," stated Paul Longworth, NNSA Deputy Administrator for Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation.

The EWGPP program's efforts will result in the permanent shutdown of the last three Russian nuclear reactors that currently produce weapons-grade plutonium. These reactors, however, also provide necessary heat and electricity to Seversk and Zheleznogorsk, two "closed cities" in the Russian nuclear weapons complex. In order to meet these energy requirements, the United States will provide support to the Russian Federation for the construction of replacement fossil energy plants.

The Russian Federation has agreed to permanently shut down the reactors once the replacement facilities are operating. The Dutch contribution will help accelerate the construction of the replacement power facility in Zheleznogorsk.

With the contribution by the Netherlands, the total international contribution to the EWGPP program has now reached approximately \$28.3 million. In January 2005, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland signed a memorandum of understanding to contribute \$20 million to the program. In March 2005, Canada committed \$7.4 million to the program. Discussions are ongoing with other potential contributors.

Established by Congress in 2000, NNSA is a semi-autonomous agency within the U.S. Department of Energy responsible for enhancing national security through the military application of nuclear energy. NNSA maintains and enhances the safety, security, reliability and performance of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile without nuclear testing; works to reduce global danger from weapons of mass destruction; provides the U.S. Navy with safe and effective nuclear propulsion; and responds to nuclear and radiological emergencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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